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Small-Scale Agriculture Today

Office for Small-Scale Agriculture



FALL 1993

U.S. Department of Agriculture - Cooperative State Research Service - Agricultural Research For A Better Tomorrow

AT ISSUE...RAISING SHEEP

"Throughout our country's history small farmers have raised sheep. They were an easy-care enterprise. Managed in harmony with nature, they produced lamb and wool from native pasture that grew on marginal lands. Sheep were known as mortgage lifters. They were profitable, which enabled their owners to contribute to the local economy. In addition, they improved the landscape by removing weeds and brush that other livestock rejected. The sheep on these farms were profitable because they required little investment of labor and capital.

Sheep are environmentally friendly. When properly managed (in a way that mimics nature), they can enhance the environment by halting the erosion of precious topsoil into our streams and lakes. They can clear the landscape of unwanted weeds and brush in a natural manner and replace the need for chemical pesticides and other technology. It is sad to see farmsteads that once supported productive happy farm families now growing up in brush while the buildings deteriorate and fall down. Rural youth are leaving the land in search of employment in the cities, contributing to the demise of many small towns across the land. What will the future hold for rural America?

I believe that sustainable agriculture carried out by small family farms will revitalize rural America. Sheep production along with other forms of regenerative agriculture can play a meaningful role in this process. By using the attributes sheep have to offer, farmers can produce food and fiber in a sound ecological manner on land unsuited for crops.

In addition to the income generated from meat and wool, flocks of sheep grazing on lush scenic pastures can bring revenue to rural economics through tourism. Our city and urban cousins will enjoy vacations in the country. This in turn will help them to be mindful of the concerns facing rural America.

New opportunities for existing business will be generated along with increased demands for new enterprises such as bed and breakfast establishments, lamb and wool processing facilities, craft cottage industries, restaurants, general stores, and other small businesses.

Sheep production and other agricultural enterprises that are in harmony with nature can and will enable rural communities to prosper and allow productive families to remain on the land they love and respect."

(John Fichtner is a grassland sheep producer in Leon, WV, and a Vo Ag instructor at Roane-Jackson VoTech Center in Leroy, WV. The above excerpt was taken from the Stockman Grass Farmer, June 1993, p. 15.)

IMPORTANT

Small-Scale Agriculture Today is published quarterly by the USDA Office for Small-Scale Agriculture (OSSA), AG Box 2244, Washington, DC 20250-2244, and is a free publication. To report change of address, give both your new and old address and send to the above address.

OSSA likes to hear from you! Your comments, calendar of events, and topics and technologies are always appreciated. However, please remember OSSA must receive your inputs - particularly your calendar of events - at least 6 months prior to the date of the event. Your cooperation is very much appreciated.

TOPICS AND TECHNOLOGY

Slightly Revised - The factsheet "Sheep" (1987) in the series "A Small-Scale Agriculture Alternative" was revised July 1993 by the USDA Office for Small-Scale Agriculture. This free publication provides sources of information for beginners and commercial shepherds. Contact: Bud Kerr, AG Box 2244, OSSA (SHEEP), Washington, DC 20250-2244; telephone 202-401-1805, Fax 202-401-1804.

At Last! - "Sell What You Sow! The Grower's Guide to Successful Produce Marketing" contains 304 pages and costs \$25 postpaid. Problems with printing and delivery caused the delay of this comprehensive book on high-value specialty produce marketing. Contact: New World Publishing, 3701 Clair Drive, Carmichael, CA 95608; telephone 916-944-7932.

Benefit - "Money Magazine reports that landscaping has a recovery value of 100 percent to 200 percent. This exceeds recovery values of even the most popular home remodeling projects - kitchen overhaul, 75 percent to 125 percent, and bathroom, 80 percent to 120 percent. The bottom line is that landscaping, lawn and garden investments will increase the value of your home." (The Bowie-Crofton Gardener, July 1993, p. 1)

Cole Crops - Broccoli and cabbage could provide extra income if grown on erodible land where agriculture is often limited to grasses. For more information, contact: Donald J. Makus, USDA-ARS, South Central Family Farms Research, Route 2, P.O. Box 144-A, Booneville, AR 72927; telephone 501-675-3834; Fax 501-675-2940.

Caution - Applying mulch too thickly on tropical fruit trees may lead to aeration problems for tree roots and eventually anaerobic conditions in the soil. Tree symptoms include leaf yellowing, and brown spotting, leaf drop and even tree death.

Specialty Farming Guides - The University of Idaho has produced a series of short publications to assist people in planning, establishing, and running specialty farms. Information is included on deciding what kind of enterprise to begin, selecting a site, business planning, marketing, and budgets. For a list of publications and ordering instructions, contact: Dan Barney, Specialty Farming Guide, University of Idaho, Sandpoint R&E Center, 2105 N. Boyer, Sandpoint, ID 83864; telephone 208-263-2323.

Reading Labels - For a free copy of the informational booklet "How to Read the New Food Label," write to: Consumer Information Center, Department 79, Pueblo, CO 81009.

Honey and Beeswax - How to make more than 360 useful products from honey and beeswax has been accumulated in a 114-page new publication, "SuperFormulas, Arts and Crafts." The cost is \$14.95, United States; \$20.75, Canada. Contact: Elaine C. White, Valley Hills Press, 8 Valley Hills, Suite 5, Starkville, MS 39759; telephone 601-323-7100.

China - "During 1993-1995, about 250,000 acres of cultivated area will be used for construction of development zones or industrial zones, accounting for 0.24 percent of China's total cultivated area in 1992 of some 247 million acres." (The Journal of Commerce, May 21, 1993, p. 4A)

Excellent - The books "Your Chickens," "Your Goats," "Your Rabbits," and "Your Sheep" are just great for kids and beginning farmers. Each book costs \$15 (paperback). Contact: Storey Communications, P.O. Box 445, Pownal, VT 05261; telephone 1-800-827-8673.

Attention - The 6-month (April through September) residential Apprenticeship in Ecological Horticulture at the UCSC Farm and Garden emphasizes hands-on learning. Application deadline is December 1, 1993. For further information and application forms, contact: Al Johnson, Apprenticeship

Coordination Agroecology Program, University of California, Santa Cruz, CA 95064; telephone 408-459-2321.

Tip - A simple neat and compact logo helps make your marketing efforts successful; remember - you have to use it everywhere you can!

Mink - The number of mink farms producing pelts continues to decline. In 1992 there were 571, down from 683 mink farms in 1991, which is a 16-percent decrease.

The Tomato Club - A year subscription (9 issues) for this new (1993) newsletter is \$17.95; \$21.95 Canada and Mexico. Contact: Robert D. Ambrose, 114 E. Main St., Bogota, NJ 07603; telephone 201-488-2231; Fax 201-489-4609.

Costs \$29 - Only 48 pages, "Poinsettias: Growing and Marketing" is for growers who would like to improve or expand their poinsettia production and sales. Contact: Sandy Smith, Ball Publishing, P.O. Box 9, Batavia, IL 60510-0009; telephone 708-208-9089, Fax 1-800-456-0132.

Flood-Hardy - Soybeans from backyard gardens in southern China have genes for flood-tolerance that are missing in U.S. and Chinese commercial varieties. For more information, contact: Tara T. Van Toai, USDA-ARS, Soil Drainage Research, 590 Woody Hayes Drive, Columbus, OH 43210; telephone 614-292-9806; Fax 614-292-9448.

New Peach - Available from nurseries in winter 1993-94 is the new eating peach Flameprince, recently released by ARS scientists. For more information, contact: William R. Okie, USDA-ARS, Southeastern Fruit and Tree Nut Research Lab, 111 New Dunbar Rd., P.O. Box 87, Byron, GA 31008; telephone 912-956-5656; Fax 912-956-2929.

Check - If your tractor alternator is not working properly, it could pull down the battery and make starting difficult. Check the alternator belt for tightness, wear and breaks, or other origins of belt fatigue and replace if necessary.

Tip - Used as a paste on a bee sting, unseasoned meat tenderizer containing the enzyme papain (made from papayas) breaks down the bee venom. The tenderizer paste should stay on the sting for about 15 minutes.

Extra Hot Stuff - What does one do with the world's hottest chile? The extreme pungency of 'Habanero' limits the culinary use of this remarkable vegetable. Now a new commercial use has been discovered. Manufacturers are using capsaicin extracted from 'Habanero' chiles as the main ingredient in Mace-like personal protection devices. Contact: Erik Sorensen, WSU Cooperative Extension, Courthouse, Pasco, WA 99301; telephone 509-545-3511.

One and Two - A recent USDA National Agricultural Statistics Service report names Texas with 185,000 and Missouri with 106,000 as the States having the most farms in 1992.

Hardwood - The International Oak Society publishes a periodical journal for those interested in oak research, cultivation, and seed exchange opportunities. Contact: M. Nigel Wright, Editor, International Oak Society, Journal Office, 1093 Ackermanville Road, Pen Argyl, PA 18072; telephone 215-588-1037.

Training a Dog - "The Guilt-Free Dog Owner's Guide: Caring for a Dog When You're Short on Time and Space," by Diana Delmar, is available for \$13.45. Contact: Storey Publishing, Storey Communications, Dept. CCG, Schoolhouse Road, Pownal, VT 05261; telephone 1-800-827-8673.

Nontoxic Water Repellent - Melt 1 ounce of paraffin wax over water in a double boiler, not over a direct flame. Use an electric stove or hotplate rather than a gas stove to minimize the risk of fire. Into a separate container, containing 1 gallon of either mineral spirits, paint thinner, or turpentine, slowly add the melted paraffin while stirring rapidly. Add 3 cups boiled linseed oil and stir thoroughly.

"Composting" - A 17-minute video produced by the Maryland Institute for Agriculture and Natural Resources shows assembly, startup, and operation of a minicomposter and large composter. Targeted to producers and service representatives in the poultry industry, this video costs \$25 for Maryland residents; \$50 for out-of-State buyers. Contact: Eslyn Joseph, Office of Distance Education, Cooperative Extension Service, 0119 Symons Hall, College Park, MD 20742; telephone 301-405-4593, Fax 301-314-9335.

"On Farm Composting" (NRAES-54) - This 186-page book presents a thorough overview of farm-scale composting and explains how to produce, use, and market compost. Cost is \$15. Make check payable to Northeast Regional Agricultural Engineering Service. Contact: NRAES, 152 Riley-Robb Hall, Cooperative Extension, Ithaca, NY 14853-5701; telephone 607-255-7654.

New Product - A hand-held meter for measuring nitrate and nitrogen levels in plant tissue is available. For more information contact: Spectrum Technologies, Inc., 12010 South Aero Drive, Plainfield, IL 60544; telephone 1-800-248-8873.

Videotapes - Sweet Basil, Know Your Market First, and Direct Marketing are new additions to the Ways to Grow video series. Videos cost \$10 each, check payable to North Carolina A&T University CEP. Contact: Valorie F. McAlpin, Director, Agriculture Communications, North Carolina A&T University, P.O. Box 21928, Greensboro, NC 27420; telephone 919-334-7047, Fax 919-334-7674.

Costs \$5 - The Gardener's Source Guide lists a total of 759 nursery and seed mail-order companies that send free catalogs. Contact: Bob Armstrong, Gardener's Source Guide, P.O. Box 206 (SSA), Gowanda, NY 14070-0206; telephone 716-532-4908.

Organic - The 192-page Organic Market Guide: New Jersey Region 1993-1994 has just been released by the Organic Farming Association of New Jersey (NOFA/NJ). It is an excellent resource for supplies and services. To receive a copy, send your check for \$12.45 to NOFA/NJ, 31 Titus Mill Road, Pennington, NJ 08534; telephone 609-737-6848; Fax 609-737-3075.

Did You Know? - "Women most likely to stick to a diet share these characteristics: they devise their diets, rather than follow standardized instructions: they don't deprive themselves of their favorite foods: they exercise; and they confront problems head-on." (The Cotton Gin and Oil Mill Press, July 10, 1993, p. 17)

A FARMER'S VIEW

"It is too bad the public isn't told about the weed eating value of goats, then they might not be quite so ready to destroy the mohair industry. Chemical control cannot continue as it has in the past, too much water is being affected—Harriet L. Jensen." (Correspondence to OSSA, May 10, 1993)

SHEEP SHEETS

"A blanket in the garden? Why not?"

British scientists are scoring impressive results from the use of wool as a mulch, *Omni* magazine reports in its July issue. In trials by the International Wool Secretariat, wool blankets in the garden were found to provide warmth for growing plants; they retain moisture, and break down easily in the soil, releasing beneficial nitrogen, potassium, sulfur, and other trace elements essential for healthy growth. The mulch mats also helped control the spread of weeds.

So far, researchers have used Karakul wool from South African sheep in their experiments. It is the color of dirt and is cheaper than other varieties. One Yorkshire town has already laid 450 meters of wool matting around newly planted trees.

The scientists hope wool will provide an environmentally benign alternative to peat, which comes from ecologically fragile bogs, and the black plastic many gardeners use to keep down weeds. They are also using wool-mulch matting in hanging flower baskets to improve water retention, and they are developing plant pots made entirely out of wool." (The Herb Companion, August/September 1993, p. 88)

(Mention of commercial enterprises or brand names does not constitute endorsement or imply preference by the U.S. Department of Agriculture.)

PLEASE CIRCULATE

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

October 8-9, 1993 - AgFest: Fall Vegetable Field Days, Truck Crops Branch Experiment Station, Crystal Springs, MS. Contact: Richard G. Snyder, Mississippi State University, P.O. Box 231, Hwy 51 South, Crystal Springs, MS 39059; telephone 601-892-3731; Fax 601-892-2056.

October 12-16, 1993 - Association for Farming Systems Research Extension Symposium, University of Florida, Gainesville, FL. Contact: Peter Hildebrand, University of Florida, 1221 N.W. 22nd Ave., Gainesville, FL 32609-3476; telephone 904-392-5830, Fax 904-392-6950.

October 14-17, 1993 - National Symposium on Goat Fiber Production, Processing, and Marketing, Marriott Hotel, Oklahoma City, OK. Contact: Thian Hor Teh, P.O. Box 730, Langston University, Langston, OK 73050; telephone 405-466-3836, Fax 405-466-3138.

October 18-21, 1993 - Blueberry Growers National Machinery Show & Exhibition, Grand Center, Grand Rapids, MI. Contact: Linda Seliga, P.O. Drawer B, Grand Junction, MI 49056; telephone 616-434-6791, Fax 616-434-6997.

November 1-3, 1993 - Shiitake Mushroom Symposium, Alabama A&M University, Huntsville, AL. Contact: Ron Williams, Alabama A&M University, P.O. Box 967, Normal, AL 35762; telephone 205-851-5710; Fax 205-851-5840.

November 5-6, 1993 - 10th Annual Hydroponic Grower's Conference, Ramada Resort Hotel, Orlando, FL. Contact: Dan Brentlinger, CropKing Inc., P.O. Box 310, Medina, OH 44258; telephone 216-725-5656; Fax 216-722-3958.

November 5-7, 1993 - The Small Farm Today Seminar and Trade Show, Midway Exposition Center, west of Columbia, MO. Contact: Chuck DeCourley, Small Farm Today, 3903 W. Ridge Trail Rd., Clark, MO 65243; telephone 1-800-633-2535; Fax 314-687-3148.

November 5-8, 1993 - 6th National Conference on Specialty Cut Flowers, Doubletree Hotel, Overland Park, KS. Contact: Alan Stevens, Kansas State University, Manhattan, KS 66506; telephone 913-532-5173.

November 8-14, 1993 - 127th Annual Convention of the National Grange, Sheraton Cleveland City Centre Hotel, Cleveland, OH. Contact: Judy Massalny, National Grange, 1616 H St., N.W., Washington, DC 20006-4999; telephone 202-628-3507, Fax 202-347-1091.

November 12-14, 1993 - American Society of Farm Managers & Rural Appraisers Annual Convention, Joseph S. Koury Convention Center, Greensboro, NC. Contact: Diane Haas, 6201 Howard Street, Niles, IL 60715; telephone 708-647-1200, Fax 708-647-7055.

January 6, 1994 - Marketplace '94, Bismarck Civic Center, Bismarck, ND. Contact: Marilyn Kipp, HC 5, Box 107, Mandan, ND 58554; telephone 701-663-1032.

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